

## Strength In Numbers

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**Grade school is a place for children to interact**, develop social skills and learn about who they are. However, while some girls develop a spice for life and confidence to last them a lifetime, others allow themselves to be hurt, degraded and manipulated.

Paul Henry Danylewich is the founder of the White Tiger Group of Montreal, Canada, as well as the organizer and host of the Annual Girl Conference Series. This series travels through eastern Canada as well as Vermont, New York, Massachusetts and Arizona offering an MTV-like experience with musical performances and keynote speakers to spread awareness to young girls about abuse.

“Part of our program is physical,” Danylewich says, “but the rest is about being assertive, setting limits and practicing with role play scenarios.”

Danylewich began martial arts at a young age and as he grew older, he started to notice trends that his future White Tiger Group could address.

“I met a lot of girls in martial arts that weren’t really interested in becoming black belts or studying the art for six years,” Danylewich says. “So as time went on, I started to see the opportunity to meet the needs of people who just wanted to learn some quick and easy techniques they could use to protect themselves and feel confident.”

Danylewich’s conference initially started after the Montreal Massacre of 1989. This event, also referred to as the École Polytechnique Massacre, was an anti-feminism stand by a male student at the university. Fourteen women were killed on Dec. 6, 1989, and 10 wounded. The anniversary of the massacre is commemorated as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

This crime against women was the catalyst for Danylewich’s Girls Conference, which started touring Canada in 2007 and expanded to the US in 2009. Today, the conference is held in hotel ballrooms across the continent in four Canadian provinces and six U.S. states with audiences of up to 300.

Intended to be a fun yet educational day, the conference lightens the mood with performances from several female artists along the tour. Performers include Amber Norgaard, Anastasia Filippova and Shaharah, to name just a few.

“Most of the reactions from the girls at this conference are not withheld,” says Filippova, who performs across Canada with the conference. “Many of them cry because they don’t understand that such abuse

happens and others cry because they relate the speaker's experiences with things that have happened in their own lives.

Some reach out to the speakers and others are inspired." Shaharah not only performs in her hometown of Montreal, but also throughout Canada and the U.S. She said that performing with the conference has affected her in a very positive way as she listens to the survival stories and helpful outlets available to the girls.

"When I was younger, I certainly didn't have this kind of event that I could attend and learn that there are so many different kinds of abuse," says Shaharah, "and that I had local resources that I could reach out to for help, if I had been in that kind of situation. Knowledge and awareness is definitely the first step."

Coupled with these performances are more serious talks from local police departments, violence survivors, self-defense instructors and survivors of those who have perished at the hands of abuse. One such survivor is a mother, Linda King, who lost her daughter Lisa in 2001.

Lisa was fresh out of college in 1992 when she met her abuser. She soon succumbed to his overpowering personality and, according to her story on King's website, [helpfixthehurt.org](http://helpfixthehurt.org), "she spent all her time with him, caring for him, loving him alone, meeting his needs. As their relationship progressed, he became more and more controlling and manipulative. If she protested even a little, she was punished."

Lisa spoke with her mother about what was going on and finally summoned the courage to file for a restraining order. Unfortunately, her abuser contacted her again with a wave of empty apologies – enough for Lisa to let down her defenses and open herself to his abuse once again.

"Six weeks later she was dead," King says. Since then, King has dedicated her life to spreading awareness through the arts about domestic violence. Her organization, Fix the Hurt, has helped to create and produce "Domestic Violence, the Musical" and is currently working on two more productions titled "Control. Assault. Delete" and "I Have This Friend."

"Communities need to concentrate more on getting this message of awareness to teens," King says, "because more and more we're just graduating abusers and victims and it makes it more difficult for them to get out of these situations as they get older."

"It's a perception that people have," Danylewich says, "that violence only happens in poor neighborhoods, but that's not the case at all."

Danylewich's Plattsburgh Girls Conference, sponsored by La Quinta Inn and Suites Plattsburgh, will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 3 at 5139 N. Catherine St. The event is open to girls ages 14-19 and costs \$19 per girl. One adult may accompany a child for free.

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